

Public Prayers Have No Place in Political Settings

When sessions of a legislature or court, at whatever level of government, open with prayer, what is really going on?

To be clear, I'm a Baptist Christian and, therefore, oppose all public prayer in political settings universally.

I'm also a proud citizen in a democracy in which the government, by definition, must not impose religion on its citizens and must allow for religious freedom.

According to my faith and reason, then, public prayers in these political settings are inappropriate for both religious and political reasons.

This makes me wonder all the more why the practice of prayer is tolerated and even endorsed by religious folk and adherents of democracy.

Do those who desire prayer before governmental proceedings:

â— Hold that God will intervene in the proceedings for the good of all (or for those who deserve the good) only if prayers precede those proceedings?

â— Think the decision-makers at the session will decide differently because the divine has been invoked at the outset?

â— Contend that prayer will produce the needed solemnity for the session, which would be absent if prayer were not offered?

â— Believe that public prayer at the beginning of a session is a strong contributor to crowd control for those observing the proceedings?

â— Pray out of habit, a sense of protocol or because the right tone for the session wouldn't be set if prayer were left out?

I suspect it is a combination of some or all of these factors.

But if prayer is, in its most general sense, some kind of communication between a human being (or like-minded group of human beings) and the divine - whether initiated and maintained by either the humans or the divine - I can't understand

how public prayers in governmental proceedings have any validity.

As far as I can determine, the practice ought to be abandoned altogether.

The only concession to those who want some semblance of prayer in governmental proceedings I can come up with - the only alternative that can honor what I understand authentic prayer to be and that doesn't dishonor real prayer - is to open each public governmental proceeding with a period of silence.

This would provide decision-makers and attendees the opportunity to reflect on what is about to occur and to draw on whatever resources - human or divine - are available to them, so that they can be best prepared to participate constructively in the proceeding.

That would, it seems to me, allow persons of faith and citizens in a democracy to honor both of these identities. It also might help everyone better understand and appreciate what's going on.

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